

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-08 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 LAB-04
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O R 281955Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6679
INFO AMEMBSSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 1381

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GY
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION MOUNTS TO GOG PLAN TO ALLOW EASIER AMENDMENT
OF THE CONSTITUTION

REF: A. GEORGETOWN 1130, B. GEORGETOWN 0996

BEGIN SUMMARY: OPPOSITION IS GROWING ON A NUMBER OF FRONTS
TO THE GOG PLAN TO CHANGE ARTICLE 73 OF THE GUYANESE
CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS TO BE
ENACTED BY A TWO-THIRDS VOTE IN PARLIAMENT (WHICH IS THE
RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS CURRENT MAJORITY).
DURING THE PAST WEEK PUBLIC GATHERINGS HAVE BEEN HELD TO
OPPOSE THE PROPOSAL FOR A REFERENDUM WHICH MUST BE HELD BETWEEN
JUNE AND OCTOBER. SUCH WIDELY DISPARATE GROUPS AS LAWYERS,
LABOR LEADERS, OPPOSITION POLITICIANS AND COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
HAVE HELD OR ARE PLANNING MEETINGS OPPOSING THE CONSTITUTIONAL
CHANGE. THE ISSUE HAS BEEN RECEIVING INCREASED ATTENTION
FROM SEVERAL PUBLICLY ACTIVE GROUPS AND ALTHOUGH THERE
ARE STILL PROBLEMS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COORDINATION AND
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PERSONAL SQUABBLING AMONG THE VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS AND
GROUPS INVOLVED, THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSAL SEEMS TO BE
CREATING AN AD HOC COALITION ACROSS A WIDE SPECTRUM OF
POLITICAL OPPOSITION GROUPS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE BILL TO AMEND THE GUYANESE CONSTITUTION WAS THE
FOCAL POINT FOR AN AD HOC GATHERING OF LAWYERS IN PRIVATE

PRACTICE WHICH MET ON APRIL 24. THE GROUP APPROVED (48 IN FAVOR WITH 3 ABSTENTIONS) A RESOLUTION TO OPPOSE THE GOG'S EFFORTS TO AMEND ARTICLE 73 OF THE CONSTITUTION. THE LAWYERS DECIDED TO ESTABLISH A 10 MEMBER COMMITTEE TO PLAN FURTHER OPPOSITION MOVES. THE COMMITTEE, WHICH INCLUDES A NUMBER OF GUYANESE LEGAL LUMINARIES, IS SCHEDULED TO MEET AGAIN ON APRIL 28. THE SECRETARY OF THE COMMITTEE, MILES FITZPATRICK, STATED THAT THE ISSUE WOULD BE FOUGHT ON A POLITICAL RATHER THAN A LEGAL OR CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS. (IN PRIVATE COMMENTS TO EMBOFFS, MEMBERS OF THE GUYANESE JUDICIARY HAVE EXPRESSED CONFLICTING VIEWS AS TO WHETHER THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT CAN BE CHALLENGED IN THE COURTS.)

2. ONE PARTICIPANT IN MEETING, PRESIDENT OF LOCAL UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION AND VICE PRESIDENT OF BAR ASSOCIATION, DONALD TROTMAN, WAS QUOTED IN MOSCOW-LINE ORGAN OF PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY, THE "MIRROR", AS HAVING "NAILED THE LIE TO GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA THAT THE GUYANA BAR ASSOCIATION HAD CALLED A BOYCOTT OF THE MEETING." SUBSEQUENTLY, IN THE GOVERNMENT-BACKED DAILY "CHRONICLE," TROTMAN CRITICIZED THE MIRROR'S REPORTING OF THE MEETING, SUGGESTING THAT IT WAS DISTORTED FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES, BUT NOT DENYING HIS OPPOSITION TO THE AMENDMENT.

3. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED AMEND-
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MENT FROM THE TRADES UNION MOVEMENT. PRESIDENT OF THE CLERICAL AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS UNION (CCWU) GORDON TODD HAS EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN OVER THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HIS UNION WOULD BE HOLDING OPEN SEMINARS ON THE ISSUE TO INFORM THE PUBLIC.

4. FINALLY, WITH A SEEMING DISREGARD OF THE CONSEQUENCES, LOCAL ROMAN CATHOLIC WEEKLY, "THE CATHOLIC STANDARD," FOR THE THIRD WEEK IN A ROW IS HARSHLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PNC PROPOSALS. STANDARD'S OPPOSITION HAS TAKEN THE FORM OF EDITORIALS, LONG ARTICLES AND SATIRICAL CARTOONS WHICH HAVE STUNG THE GOVERNMENT'S PARTY WEEKLY, THE NEW NATION, TO RESPOND WITH A BITTER FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL ATTACKING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, UNDER THE TITLE "THOU HYPOCRITE."

5. COMMENT: PARTLY IN RESPONSE TO THIS GROWING OPPOSITION, GOG IS MOBILIZING CIVIL SERVANTS, MILITARY AND POLICE (IN MUFTI) TO FLUSH OUT ATTENDANCE AT GOVERNMENT'S MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS AND TO OVERWHELM ANY LIKELY OPPOSITION. THERE IS GROWING AIR OF ANTICIPATION SURROUNDING THE HOLIDAY THIS YEAR AND MANY ARE SAYING THAT OPPOSITION

TO THE GOG MAY WELL BE MANIFESTED IN THE FORM OF SEVERE
HECKLING OF ACTING PRIMIN PTOLEMY REID (THE PRINCIPAL
MAY DAY SPEAKER) AND IN COUNTER RALLIES ORGANIZED BY THE
OPPOSITION ON THE SUGAR ESTATES.
BURKE

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